

The Historian

of Hancock County

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

May 1995

NATURE DAY FOR MAY

The May meeting will be held in conjunction with an "Environmental Fun Day Workshop" at Crosby Arboretum in Picayune on ~~Tuesday~~ ^{Wednesday} May 10 from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m.

Members, guests and the general public are invited to the free event. Bring a brown bag lunch; the Society will provide soft drinks and dessert.

We will leave in a caravan of decorated cars from Lobrano House promptly at 10 a.m.

The program, sponsored by the Pearl River County Rural Health Corps Coalition, includes workshops on disposing of old medications; protecting your yard from pollution and chemicals; assuring that your septic tank works; beautifying the roadways; how to be litter free by 2003; how to be an environmentally friendly shopper; poison prevention at home, and environmental games.

Free Health screening will be available for glucose, cholesterol and blood pressure.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

On Mondays and Tuesdays each week, we work on photo albums at the Lobrano house and the pleasure of your company is greatly desired. This is a fun and on-going project that we all can participate in. Please come and work with us.

(Continued on page 2)



PORTIA LEONORA LABAT 1896-1995

LABAT LEGACIES

Portia Lebat who died on April 17 was a charter member of our society and a descendant of one of the first settlers in Bay St. Louis. Her family tree bears names that are steeped in the history of the town: Fayard, Hazeur, Piernas, Charlot, Marquez, Farve, Prudeau, Tate, Cospelich.

Two of Portia's surviving sisters - 86-year-old Veronica and 96-year-old Celestine (who now wears the mantle of matriarch) talked about the family one recent afternoon.

Joseph, free man of color, moved from Martinique to Convent, La. about 1840. He

married Celestine Lanaux, a light-skinned slave whom he bought for \$1,000, said Miss Celestine, who is named for her grandmother but nicknamed "Teenie".

The first Labats moved to Bay St. Louis before the Civil War, Miss Teenie said. From their union were born nine children, one of them Joseph, born in 1886. In 1890, he married Eleonore Fayard. Portia was one of the 13 children of this union, four of whom survive today: Elise Labat Webster of Meridian, Victor Labat of New Orleans, and Veronica and Celestine who occupy the family home on Easterbrook Street.

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PRESIDENT from page 1

Waveland members especially, we need your help in documenting the Waveland Cemetery. Mayor Mason and other city officials have asked us to help them document the graves in the cemetery just off Waveland Avenue north of the railroad tracks. This will involve your physical presence as well as a note pad and pencil, the latter two we will provide if you will provide the first. As you may remember, Meg Hilliker did the Cedar Rest Cemetery a few years back and it has been an invaluable asset to us in locating people when requested to do so.

We had over four hundred visitors through the Loblano House last week, including most of the sixth graders in Hancock County, the directors of the Mississippi Visitors Stations, and a number of genteel passers-by. It is a good feeling to see our facility being used and appreciated.

While we are on that subject, the Loblano House is YOUR house and it is available should you need it for downtown entertaining. Just contact Patt Cucul or Charles Gray about details.

Charles Gray, President

WE WISH TO THANK....

Petie and Ron Hyman for donating two beautiful sandwich trays and two large salad bowls to our kitchen. We used all four at the April lunch. Thank you, Ron and Petie. These items will be very useful.

Dave McDonald for donating a marvelous book, "Strange To Say..." by Mrs. Carter H. Harrison. In the future, we will print some of Mrs. Harrison's memories of Bay St. Louis from the interesting period during the latter half of the last century. Her grandmother's home later became the Mollere Home located on Beach Boulevard at Mollere Drive.

LABAT from page 1

"We've lived in this house all our lives," Miss Teenie said. "My father bought the property about 1892 for \$35. It was a three-room house with detached kitchen with a walk-in pantry and an outhouse on a big piece of land. Our parents moved here with their first child, Inez. The other 12 children were born here. Father built the additions to the house."

Joseph Labat, a renowned carpenter who constructed numerous important buildings in Hancock county, trained four generations of carpenters, including his sons, Miss Teenie said. Four of his brothers worked with him, three as carpenters, one as bricklayer, but his sons found careers in other fields.

"All of us worked, the girls mostly as teachers except Veronica," who still holds an office position with the Southern Forest Experiment Station in Gulfport. "Victor is retired from his teaching post at Xavier University in New Orleans; Sumner was trained as a tailor; Fabien worked for the federal government in Washington; and Joseph and Lucien started the dry cleaning business in the late 20s," Miss Teenie said. "The original cleaners was on Beach Blvd., then moved to Main Street behind Hancock Bank, then to the present location on Easterbrook."

The value of education was instilled in the Labat children early. Their father, in the days when there were no schools for black children, was tutored by a Frenchman and he, in turn, educated his brothers, Miss Teenie said.

"Our parents spoke French, but when we were around, they switched to English," she said. During their youth, St. Rose Catholic School, a two-room schoolhouse on Second Street opposite City Hall, was available for colored children up to grade six. "We all

attended St. Rose, then moved on to the public school for colored through grade 9. The principal was G. W. Brown, so we called it Brown School," said Miss Teenie, laughing. "There was no high school, so we had to go out of town for that. I went to Indianapolis, and Portia went to Hattiesburg."

In 1923 the diocese planned a new St. Rose School for colored on Necaie Avenue. Joseph Labat built the school, and one of the two teachers was Portia Labat. The school by then had expanded to grade 9. In 1924 when five teaching nuns were sent to St. Rose, Portia left for a teaching position in a parochial school in Tuscaloosa, Ala. Later Portia taught in a one-room schoolhouse in Logtown and later to a 2-room schoolhouse in Pearlington after structures were moved from Logtown to make way for NASA's buffer zone, Miss Teenie said. During these years, Portia commuted by car to her jobs while she also kept house for her father, widowed since 1930.

"Concern for those less fortunate was bred into the Labat children," Miss Teenie said. "Mother was always concerned about orphans. She sent clothes to the Lafon Home for Colored Orphans in New Orleans. And we had cousins poorer than us and mother collected things for them. We had some cousins who had to wait until their father came in and sold his fish before there was money to buy bread. Mother tried to take care of them. And at Christmas time, she would say that Santa couldn't bring us much because he had a lot of poor children to take care of. She did without so we could have things," Miss Teenie said.

Race relations were never a problem for the Labats, both Miss Teenie and Miss Veronica report. "We were a respected family, and this is a quiet

CIVIL WAR DAYS - HANCOCK COUNTY AND VICINITY
COMPILED AND EDITED BY CLYDE CUCULLU
MEMBER - HANCOCK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Pioneer - Confederate Submarine

April 1, 1862, letter of Collector F. H. Hatch at New Orleans to Sec. of State J. P. Benjamin.

I enclose application of John K. Scott for the issue of letter of marque to the submarine propeller Pioneer. Enclosure 1 to Benjamin by John K. Scott: Application is made for authority in the name of the Government of these States to issue to the undersigned as commander of the submarine boat called the Pioneer for authority to cruise the high seas, bays, rivers, estuaries etc., in the name of the Government and by the destruction or capture of any and all vessels at war with the Confederate States.

Said vessel is commanded by John K. Scott, who is a citizen of New Orleans and the confederacy. Said vessel was built at New Orleans in the year 1862; is a propeller; is 34 feet in length; is 4 feet in breadth; is 4 feet deep. She measures about 4 tons; has round conical ends and is painted black. She is owned by Robert Barrow, Baxter Watson, and James R. McClintock, all of New Orleans. She will carry a magazine of explosive matter, and will be manned by two men or more.

Philips, Eugenia -

SENTENCED

By official publication from the office of Maj. Gen. Butler, Mrs. Philips, who was last summer incarcerated in Washington, was on Monday (June 30) condemned to imprisonment to Ship Island until further orders, as "a bad and dangerous woman, stirring up strife and inciting to riot."

The specific offence charged against her is, that during the funeral procession of the late Lieut. De Kay, she was laughing and mocking at his remains, and on being interrogated by the Commanding General she replied that she was "in good spirits that day."

Source: N.O. Commercial Bulletin - Wed. July 2, 1862.

community. We had white neighbors and had very good relations with them. We never knew this town as segregated. We could go anywhere," Miss Veronica said. But not the movies, and not because they wouldn't sit in the colored balcony.

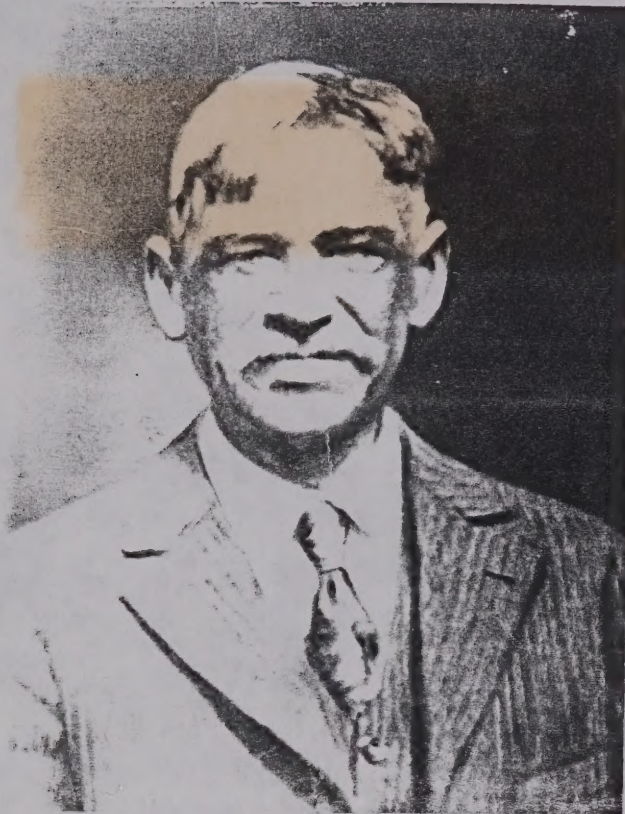
"There was an outdoor movie near Fahey's Drugstore. We used to sit on my friend's chicken house and we could see everything - Greta Garbo making love," Miss Teenie said with a shy chuckle. "Mother didn't approve of the movies because of the love scenes."

Portia traveled widely during her summer vacations, sisters reported. "Trips to Europe, Cuba, Nassau, and of course all over Mississippi by car. We'd drive by a town, and she'd laugh and say she had a boyfriend in each one of them," Miss Teenie said. She was very witty and very popular. She'd say, "I've been everywhere except jail."

"While Portia never married, she had many suitors", Miss Teenie said. "Once she was engaged and had even assembled a trousseau. But differences in religion caused her to reject the non-Catholic. And there was one man who asked her mother for her hand". Miss Teenie didn't know what she said, but speculated "I guess Portia said no."

The family is proud that Portia took part in the famous march with Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. to Montgomery while she was in Atlanta taking care of her sick sister, Chloithile.

Miss Teenie recalls her maternal grandmother, Philomene Maconilla Fayard, a former slave, part Choctaw, who bore 11 children, including Eleanor. "Everyone in town knew her. She lived alone, and wouldn't stay with anyone. Everybody sheltered her," Miss Teenie reported. "She took care of all the graves of people she knew."



Joseph Labat 1868 - 1947

Portia is buried in Cedar Rest Cemetery among her ancestors in the Labat family plot. Miss Teenie may be seen on fine days raking the magnolia leaves from the family graves.

Edith Back

LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS

Mon. 8 to 4 or by
Tue. 8 to 4 appointment
Thur. 8 to 4

LIVE OAK REGISTRATION

Now is the time to register your live oak tree. You will receive a Certificate of Registration and a plaque to mount on your tree with the name of your tree, which you choose. Trees must be at least 36 inches in diameter or 113 inches in circumference. Call Irwin Cucullu at 467-6252 for additional information.

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HANCOCK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Post Office Box 3 1 2
Bay St. Louis, Mississippi 39520

Hancock County Historical Society

KATE LOBRANO HOUSE - 108 CUE STREET

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